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Rutherford National Guard MP's providing security in Italy

NASHVILLE – It has been only four months since the soldiers of Murfreesboro's 269th Military Police Company deployed to Yuma, Arizona, working directly with U.S. Border Patrol agents securing the U.S.-Mexico border during Operation Jump Start. Now the Tennessee Army National Guard unit is working with a different kind of law enforcement agency.

From January 6 through February 10, approximately 70 Tennessee National Guard soldiers from the unit are conducting Annual Training at the Caserma Ederle military complex in Vicenza, Italy. Divided into two groups of 35 soldiers each, the guardsmen will be in Italy for a three-week rotation. Their mission is to assist the Army's 13th Military Police Company and the Caserma Ederle Provost Marshal's Office in conducting law and order operations throughout the main post and the Villagio base-housing areas.

The guardsmen are working hand-in-hand with their active-duty counterparts in law enforcement patrols, access control, and force protection. They are also a response force for crime scene and accident containment. The soldiers are conducting 24-hour operations and providing all personnel required to secure the post.

"The mission here is an interesting one," said Staff Sgt. Jason Bucklew, from Murfreesboro. "The soldiers are receiving valuable training in enforcing local regulations and policies as well as seeing a different way to enforce the law." The guardsmen are honing their law enforcement skills and training on security operations, a mission that could serve them well in the United States or wherever they're needed.

They are also working side by side with the Carabinieri (Italian National Police) and Italian Security Guards. "We're sharing skills and teaching each other the differences in U.S. and Italian law enforcement practices," said Staff Sgt. Michael Loyd from Eagleville. "We're learning different ways to look at our jobs and the Italian police are learning different methods from us. Each agency works differently and we can all learn from each other." Loyd recently returned from a year-long deployment to Germany managing a police station on a U.S. Army installation.

The Tennesseans are proud to be given the mission. "All the soldiers here are pumped up about having the opportunity to provide law enforcement on the Italian post," Bucklew said. "Many of us are police officers in our civilian jobs in Rutherford County or with the Metro Police Department. Seeing the law enforcement challenges that face the Italians is an experience we can bring home."

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Rutherford National Guard soldiers

Recently, the unit assisted in apprehending suspects accused of assault. The Murfreesboro MP's cordoned off the crime scene and searched through numerous buildings where the suspects were believed to be hiding. 2nd Lt. Lawrence Lutes from Chattanooga reported, "The suspects were found and are now in custody."

Between missions, many of the soldiers take time to explore the local towns and visit major cities like Venice, Florence and Verona. "Some of these places we've seen in movies or read about in books, and it's pretty special to finally be able to see them in real life," Bucklew said.

Vicenza is about 25 miles west of Venice and two hours south of the Alps. It is famous for Architect Andrea Palladio's Rotunda and Teatro Olimpico. Caserma Ederle in Vicenza is the headquarters for the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force and home of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The post is named after an Italian World War I hero, Major Carlo Ederle, who was awarded the French War Cross.

The 70 soldiers currently in Italy are only a part of the force in Murfreesboro. In February, 40 soldiers from the unit will be conducting a three-week rotation back to Yuma, Arizona, to help secure the southern border. They will assist Border Patrol agents by establishing Entry Identification Teams and helping spot illegal immigrants crossing into Arizona.

Bucklew said, "Since September 11, 2001, Murfreesboro has patrolled Nashville International Airport, set up Iraqi police stations in Baghdad, helped train Bulgarian military policemen, and worked with U.S. Border Patrol agents along the Arizona border. The company also patrolled the city of Gulfport, Mississippi, immediately following Hurricane Katrina and assisted police in Gallatin following the tornadoes in April. Any chance we get to help our community and nation, we're there."

The first rotation of soldiers from Murfreesboro will return to the United States on January 27. The second rotation will return on February 10.

By Capt. Darrin Haas
Tennessee National Guard Public Affairs

CUTLINES:

Sgt. Jonathon Ray, of Smyrna, inspects ID cards at the main gate of Caserma Ederle military complex in Vicenza, Italy. He is using a hand-held scanner which determines the holder's security access.

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